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ABSTRACT

Cognitive dissonance theory suggests that counseling students will be most inclined to develop and later use those skills which they perceive as being valuable. For example, if students consider display of warmth a characteristic which distinguishes effective from ineffective counselors, it is more likely that once graduated the students will display warmth to their clients, irrespective of how valid this perception of the effects of displaying warmth might be. Clearly then, counseling students' perceptions regarding characteristics of effective counselors should be of interest to counselor educators. To examine these perceptions, all students enrolled in counselor education at a large university were asked to rate the extent to which 35 adjectives were descriptive of each of four counselor types. The ratings were analyzed using a principal components procedure. Differences in the student ratings were identified and discussed. Findings have implications for programs training students for the helping professions. (Author)

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PROFESSIONAL SELF-CONCEPT AS A TRAINING CONSTRUCT FOR THE HELPING PROFESSIONS

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ABSTRACT

All students enrolled in counselor education at a large university rated the extent to which thirty-five adjectives were descriptive of each of four counselor types. The ratings were analyzed using a principal components procedure. Differences in the student ratings are identified and discussed. Findings have implications for programs training students for the helping professions.

Cognitive dissonance theory suggests that counseling students will be most inclined to develop and later use those skills which they perceive as being valuable. For example, if students consider display of warmth a characteristic which distinguishes effective from ineffective counselors, it is more likely that once graduated the students will display warmth to their clients, irrespective of how valid this perception of the effects of displaying warmth might be. Clearly then, counseling students' perceptions regarding characteristics of effective counselors should be of interest to counselor educators.

Unfortunately, there has been little research done conderning attitudes of students toward themselves as counselors, or concerning the attitudes of students toward others who are counselors. The objective of this study was to gain such information regarding the attitudes of one cohort of students.

The instrument used in the study was the Attitudes Toward Counselors (ATC) Survey, an instrument developed by the authors. The instrument requires respondents to indicate the extent to which each of 35 adjectives are descriptive of each of four counselors. The four counselors rated are:

"The one real person whom I believe is the best counselor I know," "Myself as a counselor," "A real counselor I know whom I believe is a poor counselor," and "The one real counselor education student whom I believe will most facilitate client growth."

The instrument measures five dimensions of counselor characteristics which the literature suggests are displayed by effective counselors. First, the ATC Survey measures characteristics of warmth. There is a clear emphasis in the literature on warmth as an important counselor characteristic. In a sophisticated multiple regression analysis (Johnson, Shertzer, Linden, and Stone, 1967), "friendliness" was found to be a significant predictor of counseling effectiveness. Demos and Zuwaylif (1966) found that effective counselors possessed more nurturance and affiliation than ineffective counselors, who exhibited more autonomy, abasement, and aggression. In a synthesis of counseling research, Bergin (1966) states, "It has thus become increasingly clear, within the limits of these studies, that a therapist's ability to be warm and positively inclined toward his patients is an effective ingredient (p. 239)." This conclusion is also supported in a review of the literature by Shertzer and Stone (1974).

The instrument measures the knowledge acsribed to the four rated counselors. Some research (Wallach and Strupp, 1964; Strupp, 1958) suggests that the theoretical perspective of the counselor affects the way that counselors approach counseling situations and thus probably also counseling effectiveness. There is, however, little research contrasting the effectiveness of untrained with trained counselors. Still, most educators assume that counselors who become acquainted with various theories and develop a personal theoretical perspective vis a vis counseling are more effective for having done so.

Objective empathy also seems to be an important attribute of the effective counselor. Truax and Carkhuff (1964) define empathy as "accurate sensitivity to current feeling and the verbal facility to communicate this understanding in a language attuned to the patient's current being (p. 8)." To remain objective means to be able to stand back and observe what is happening from a neutral or nonimposing frame of reference (Belkin, 1975). Arbuckle (1956) asked counseling students to list in order of preference the three traits they most and least preferred to see in counselors; lack of understanding and disinterest were two of the three traits which were seen as being least desirable. Cartwright and

Lerner (1963) found empathic understanding of the client to be positively associated with client growth. For the past 30 years, Rogers (1962) has emphasized the importance of empathy in his writings.

The emotional health of the counselor is an important determinant of counseling success. Truax (1963) found this quality to be one of three predictors of client growth in hospitalized schizophrenics. Bergin and Soloman (1963) found that a high degree of therapist personal disturbance is dysfunctional in counseling. Carkhuff and Berenson (1967) posit that the counselor "cannot respect the feelings and experiences of others if he cannot respect his own feelings and experiences (p. 27)."

Finally, the instrument measures characteristics of counselor firmness and directiveness. Many researchers and theoreticians (Krumboltz and Thorensen, 1964; Truax, 1966; Rogers, 1961) agree these characteristics impact counseling effectiveness, though there is some disagreement as to whether being non-directive or confronting most helps clients.

METHOD

Subjects

The ATC Survey was administered to all graduate students

enrolled in counselor education at a large university. Of 163 obtained returns, 152 were usable (n/N=.932). Instruments were deemed nonusable when more than two scales per rated counselor type were blank or marked twice. Otherwise, blank scale scores were estimated at the median score for the counselor type for that respondent.

Results

Based on application of Cattell's (1966) "scree test," five factors accounting for 65.8% of the total variance were extracted from the correlation matrix. Alpha factor analysis of the data yielded Cronbach generalizability coefficients for the dimensions of .988, .806, .615, .410, and .181, respectively. The five factors derived from the principal components analysis were then rotated using a Harris-Kaiser (1964) Case II rotation procedure (P' P proportional to L). Based on inspection of factor pattern and structure coefficients, the dimensions were judged to measure counselor characteristics of warmth, education, impartiality, emotional health, and firmness. Factor pattern and structure coefficients and factor and total variance percentages accounted for are presented in Table 1. The factor correlation matrix is presented in Table 2.

Table 1

Factor Pattern and Structure Coefficients

ITEM	FACTOR									
	Warmth		Education		Impartiality		Health		Firmness	
	P	S	P	S	P	S	P	S	P	S
Insensitive	-.620	-.727	-.103	.377	-.114	-.452	-.028	-.131	-.189	-.253
Brainy	.070	.144	.636	.537	-.197	-.028	.518	.452	-.011	.095
Flexible	.575	.790	.135	.473	.397	.681	.107	-.075	-.087	-.176
Neurotic	-.248	-.558	-.246	-.477	-.398	-.618	.085	.223	.120	.184
Humane	.483	.732	.150	.485	.371	.649	-.115	-.273	.032	-.060
Concerned	.551	.837	.084	.458	.295	.622	-.081	-.252	.081	-.021
Aware	.663	.818	.276	.595	.205	.563	.097	-.088	.043	-.015
Warm	.651	.851	.045	.443	.377	.691	-.033	-.213	.020	-.093
Rigid	-.460	-.703	-.193	-.454	-.319	-.625	-.051	.123	.305	.373
Stubborn	-.163	-.475	-.203	-.375	-.433	-.622	-.023	.115	.380	.438
Gentle	.471	.691	.006	.356	.425	.656	-.134	-.280	.028	-.084
Educated	.179	.439	.798	.839	-.115	.204	.038	-.073	.102	.168
Ignorant	-.344	-.599	-.525	-.685	.005	-.352	.190	.323	.049	.050
Diseased	-.066	-.368	-.543	-.605	.036	-.240	.443	.523	.096	.081
Adjusted	.212	.591	.322	.585	.487	.703	-.137	-.280	.019	-.051
Dispassionate	-.737	-.739	.099	-.229	-.029	-.355	.139	.274	.029	.120
Detached	-.779	-.704	.133	-.174	.108	-.222	.157	.275	-.017	.063
Unbiased	.166	.451	.166	.376	.541	.656	.201	.071	-.098	-.152
Dogmatic	-.402	-.601	-.197	-.389	-.180	-.478	-.002	.148	.380	.427
Firm	.023	.071	.155	.269	.071	.044	-.094	-.079	.742	.738
Sick	-.143	-.504	-.423	-.593	-.216	-.485	.410	.524	.105	.140
Caring	.611	.815	.134	.501	.289	.517	-.129	-.295	.070	-.025
Intelligent	.282	.538	.764	.851	-.111	.250	.001	-.127	.083	.134
Sane	.078	.468	.484	.662	.269	.498	-.410	-.512	.111	.080
Knowledgeable	.326	.611	.672	.823	.031	.386	-.003	-.147	.074	.093
Healthy	.074	.450	.442	.624	.258	.476	-.466	-.559	.137	.100
Unbending	-.536	-.695	-.111	-.365	-.159	-.490	.056	.214	.314	.382
Wholesome	.153	.499	.288	.536	.450	.614	-.209	-.321	.185	.118
Clinical	-.360	-.223	.377	.245	.178	.056	.442	.452	.158	.227
Objective	.205	.559	.264	.538	.606	.755	.107	-.037	.103	.028
Understanding	.580	.819	.168	.534	.347	.569	-.090	-.264	.051	-.044
Impartial	.186	.532	.188	.451	.642	.773	.138	-.007	-.028	-.111
Informed	.473	.663	.553	.736	-.003	.358	.154	.001	.085	.096
Rigorous	.254	.048	.008	.050	-.207	-.211	.371	.383	.556	.584
Neutral	-.274	.025	-.069	.044	.771	.612	.149	.105	-.051	-.128
% Factor Variance (Sum = 100)	35.4		25.3		23.6		08.4		07.3	
% Total Variance (Sum = 65.8)	23.3		16.7		15.5		05.5		04.8	

NOTE: P = Pattern coefficients; S = Structure coefficients

Table 2

Factor Correlation Matrix

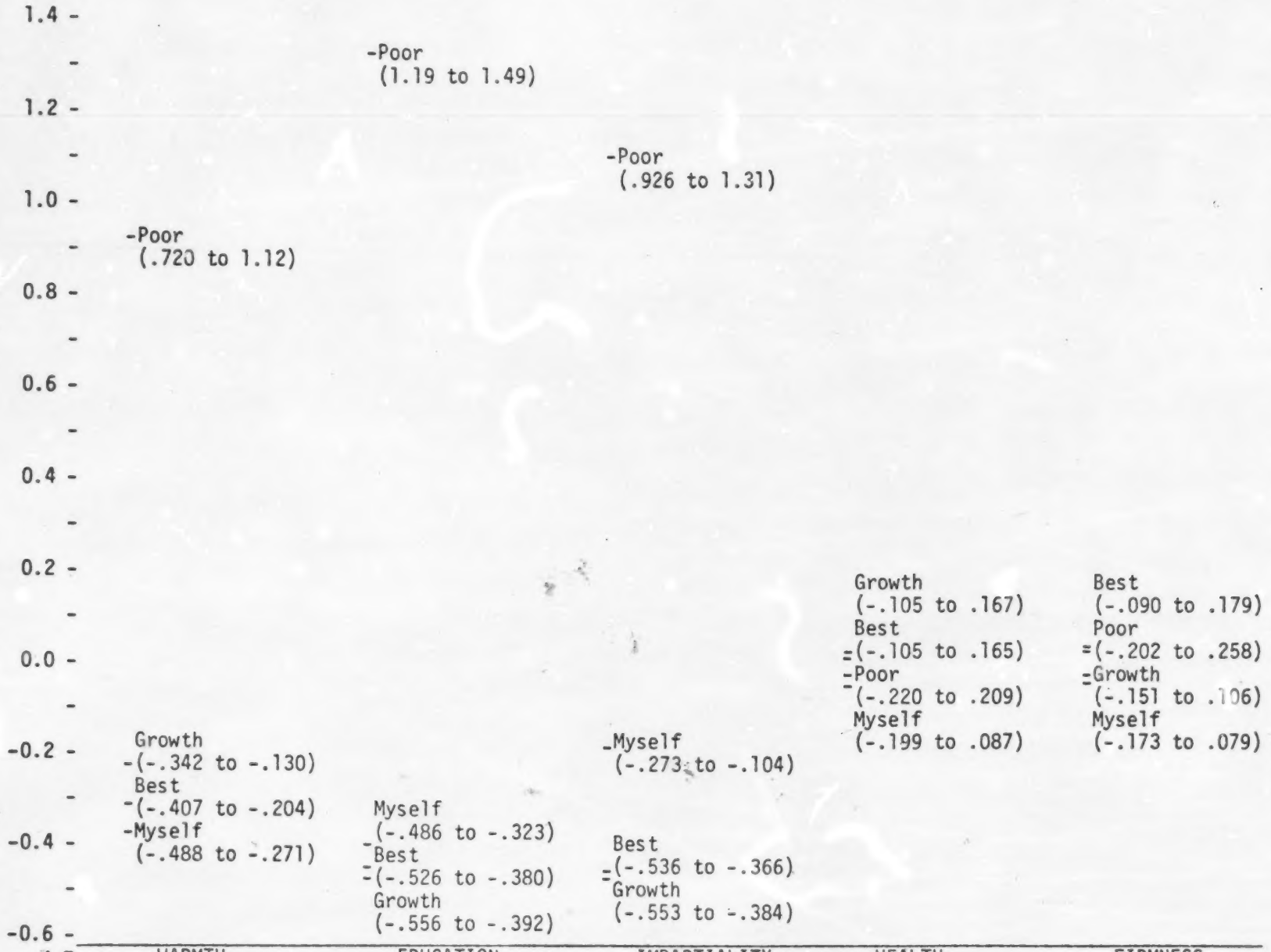
	FACTOR				
FACTOR	Warmt	Educa	Impar	Healt	Firmn
Warmth	1.000				
Education	.413	1.000			
Impartiality	.454	.321	1.000		
Health	-.192	-.123	-.132	1.000	
Firmness	-.095	.085	-.138	.065	1.000

Standardized factor scores were calculated. Based on the mean and standard error of the mean for each counselor type on each dimension, simultaneous confidence intervals were established within which one could conclude (p .05) that sampling did not account for the range of the factor score means. When one of the confidence intervals failed to include the position of zero, this was taken as a clear nonneutral judgment of the counselor type by the respondents as a whole on that dimension. When any two confidence intervals on any one factor overlapped, this was taken to indicate that the students as a group did not distinguish between the two counselors on the given factor. The results of the counselor type comparisons across the five dimensions are summarized in Figure 1.

DISCUSSION

Analysis of the Figure 1 data using these decision rules suggests several conclusions. First, the "best" and "most growth" counselors were not rated differently on four of the five factors. While it is logical to expect that "best" counselors should be equated with effective counselors, similar logic has not held up in other professions. For example, Thompson and Miller (in press) found that teacher

Figure 1: Counselors Arrayed Along Factor Vectors



NOTE: Dashes indicate mean for counselor rated. Confidence intervals in parentheses.

trainees distinguish on several factors between "best" teachers and teachers "from whom I learned the most content material."

Second, students did not employ the emotional health or firmness factors in conceptualizing any of the four counselors. This does not mean that the students considered these two characteristics unimportant qualities for counselors to possess. Rather, these findings suggest that the students do not use these criteria to distinguish among counselors when making judgments regarding the effectiveness of counselors. This might be interpreted as meaning that students assume that most counselors, even poor ones, are emotionally healthy and not dysfunctionally firm, rigorous, or stubborn. Alternatively, students may feel that distinguishing among counselors on the basis of directiveness is inappropriate since, the students may feel, some counselors can effectively help different clients even if the counselors display varying degrees of directiveness.

Third, and most importantly, on four of the five factors the students did not see themselves as being different from either the "best" or "most growth" ideal counselors. The students saw themselves as being deficient only on the factor

of impartiality.

These conclusions have at least two important implications for counselor education. The second conclusion suggests that counselor education programs may need to make more intensive efforts at persuading students that there is a relationship between counselor emotional health and counselor effectiveness, and that some poor counselors can be distinguished from effective counselors on this basis. There may be a need to override a phenomenon whereby students who have emotional difficulties avoid focusing on these problems in order to avoid pain, and whereby some students who are experiencing few emotional problems consider focusing on the problems of colleagues either an unprofessional intrusion or an action which may embroil them in threatening conflict.

Finally, the findings show that students across all program levels taken as a group see themselves as having the warmth, education, health, and firmness of their ideal colleagues. A finding that only students who were nearing graduation from an advanced degree program saw themselves as having already attained the characteristics of ideal counselors would not be so worrisome. But the finding reported here is

worrisome indeed because it suggests that the students probably feel little internal motivation to develop further skills in areas where ideals have already been attained. These findings indicate that it may be necessary for training programs to exert more effort at encouraging students to continually and objectively evaluate their professional self-concepts.

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